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I am a social worker for older adults in a managed long term care plan. We are constrained by only having one mental health provider who will accept the Medicare rates. Even if an organization will see someone within our plan ad-hoc, there are no mental health providers to take on new clients. Many of our folks are struggling with no outlet available.

I am also the daughter of a woman with schizophrenia, who is grieving the loss of her husband and primary caregiver. She is linked with a psychiatrist and counselor, but they spend 5 minutes on telephone appointments with her because they are overwhelmed with their caseloads. Her condition is declining and destabilizing due to her grief and nature of her condition, and her children were told by her psychiatrist that her only option to stabilize would be to go to ECMC, although he noted that they will not accept her currently due to being short staffed as well. Given the current conditions of CPEP, I would not want her to go there either. I think it would make matters worse for her mental health. My family has met with psychiatrists, health homes, geriatric care managers, and lawyers - none of these systems have been able to identify any help for my mother. Either she makes too much money in survivor's benefits to qualify for Medicaid plans, or she makes too little to pay for any help privately. She is too high functioning physically to qualify for help in the home, but her mental health is quickly declining. We have been told by several professionals (and remember, I am a social worker, so I have many resources as well) that we simply need to wait for my mother to decline more and reach emergency situation before she can get help. Even then, I do not trust help will be available for her.

On top of this situation with my mother, my siblings and I are taking on the toll of caring for her while grieving the loss of my father. We have also been unable to find proper mental health care for ourselves. Most providers do not accept insurance, and we simply can not afford to pay privately, if we can even find a provider. Many providers only see clients during business hours as well, which is a barrier. The lack of providers, the financial barriers, and the very sensitive nature of finding someone who you trust and feel you can benefit from make finding therapy virtually impossible for many. It seems that many people think "just go to counseling" is a fix, but there is much more to it than that.

I went into this field 15 years ago to better understand and navigate the system, to try to make improvements and help people who need it. The system has just gotten worse.

Social workers, counselors, mental health providers are hailed as heroes, but are often fighting for grant funding and making \$30k/year while paying off graduate school loans. PSLF is a joke. How can we expect to solve any issues if we don't truly value the providers everyone wants to magically make appear? We need to attract individuals to this field with true compensation, we need to make mental health care commensurate with primary health care, we need resources for the lower middle-class people falling through the cracks of qualifying for anything, we need more emergency resources than one overrun and understaffed hospital, we need more help and less stigma for people with psychiatric illness (I'm talking hallucinations and delusions). People seem to talk about mental health support until someone is delusional, then they are afraid and don't know what to do. Crisis Services is an incredible resource - they need WAYYYYY more funding. The staff there should make double what they make, and they should not have to rely on volunteers to do the deep work that they do. We need to get our priorities straight as a society.